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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000158

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PHUM EAID AM
SUBJECT: GOAM UNVEILS ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY WITH
PUBLIC FANFARE

REF: 03 YEREVAN 02355

11. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat
accordingly.

SUMMARY

12. (SBU) Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian unveiled the GOAM's first anti-corruption strategy Jaunary 16 during a public hearing that included an impressive array of ministers, legislators and international observers. Disparate parts of the GOAM put on a united public face during the meeting, with the exception of the opposition parties who were noticeably absent from the event. The meeting featured congratulatory speeches by high-level GOAM officials who touted the strategy as vital to Armenia's economic development and claimed it represented a totally collaborative effort with the help of the donor community. Transparency International's strong criticism of the document elicited applause from local NGOs. End summary.

GOAM WHO'S-WHO UNVEILS NEW STRATEGY

13. (SBU) Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian unveiled the GOAM's first anti-corruption strategy Jaunary 16 during a public hearing that included an impressive array of ministers, legislators, international observers and NGOs. A high-level media splash was followed by a series of technical "roundtables" on various aspects of the plan's implementation. Well over half of Armenia's cabinet level officials attended the meeting in a display of GOAM support for the new plan. Traditionally disparate elements of the GOAM put on a united public face during the meeting. The most notable exception was the opposition Justice Bloc, whose representatives were noticeably absent. Republican Party parliamentarian Vazgen Khachikyan dismissed their absence as "insignificant," adding that "everyone who matters supports this plan."

14. (SBU) The meeting featured congratulatory speeches by high-level GOAM officials who touted the strategy as a vital part of Armenia's economic development. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said the strategy was designed to send a message of "zero tolerance for corruption" to the international community. Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy Tigran Khachatryan said the strategy was inextricably linked to the GOAM's poverty reduction strategy adopted in late 2003 (reftel). National Assembly Deputy Speaker Tigran Torosyan's remarks made numerous references to the "high level of cooperation with the donor community" in creating the strategy.

STRONG CRITICISM FROM TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

15. (U) Transparency International (TI) offered the strongest criticism of the document during the meeting, eliciting applause from local NGOs. Local TI office representative Amalia Kostanyan said the plan failed to address corruption in the military and with respect to the use of environmental resources. She criticized the GOAM for not fully engaging the donor community during every step of the creation of the plan and said there was an overall lack of political will on the part of GOAM

officials to cooperate with outside partners on the problem of corruption.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) The January 16 meeting was clearly designed to lend the greatest possible level of legitimacy to the new plan despite earlier criticism on various technical aspects by international observers. This criticism centered on the strategy's lack of focus and an overly ambitious list of "priority areas" that watered down otherwise important objectives. Despite comments made by GOAM officials for the benefit of the press, the donor community did not have a chance to comment on the most recent draft of the strategy prior to its release. USG officials went on record at the most recent U.S.-Armenia Task Force meetings in November 2003 stating their disappointment at the lack of transparency during this last phase of the drafting process. OSCE representatives commented during the January 16 meeting that the donor community, while committed in principle to assisting Armenia with its anti-corruption efforts, would need to closely examine the strategy before it could commit resources for specific programs.

RICHTER